

Art in a Time of Epidemic. *These Times*

by Leyla Dunia (Translated from Spanish)

These Times is the name of the latest art project coordinated by the New York-based non-profit organization TRANS>, led by curator and editor Sandra Antelo-Suárez. The proposal, in the form of 50 postage stamps created by as many different artists and institutions, is a response to the global crisis caused by COVID-19. The participants, all resident in places the pandemic has hit hard, such as the Latin American region, Germany, Portugal and Japan, have configured an artistic gesture that sets out to subtly infiltrate the postal communication system and reach directly into the domestic sphere.

Confronted by the closure of cultural institutions, galleries and artists' workshops during the strictest phase of the lockdown, Sandra Antelo-Suárez got to wondering how the art world could engage with this situation. The response was the invitation to a group of artists to take part in a collective venture which rethinks the mechanism for the distribution of art, sending it directly to the homes of its recipients. At a time when the physicality of communications is fading into the digital realm, *These Times* embraces the stamp format in a physical-digital combination that constitutes a highly intentioned act of silent resistance.

In diptych format, a total of 50,000 copies have been distributed in the October 2020 issue of *FRIEZE* magazine, in an action that attempts to “encourage poetic gestures of communication, especially crucial in this global moment that has deeply affected our communities”. In this way the space of the page is proposed as a traveling exhibition space, bypassing the restrictions and slipping along unnoticed in an envelope, recalling the

strategy of portability of Duchamp's traveling suitcases and Lucy Lippard's Numbers Shows, as well as the *Insertions into Ideological Circuits* of Cildo Meireles.

The stamps, which function as individual decals, also evoke the heart-warming feeling of receiving a physical letter in the mail. At the same time, in the current US context, this format clearly relates to the polarized pre-election political climate as a call to our individual responsibility to participate in the democratic system by way of the postal ballot.

The project aims to open up a space of encounter in which artists, institutions and the public can come together in a participatory setting. The intention is to set up a space of communal solidarity in which to share the collectivity of affect and the feeling of support in relation to the loss of the victims of the pandemic. This being so, a fundamental aspect of the project is the participatory dimension, with the people involved being invited to use the postage stamps in their communications and to create their own proposal in a physical or digital format from a template available on the Instagram account @TheseTimesForever.

The Guatemalan artist **Regina José Galindo** has created a black and white stamp that reads "Estamos Vivos" – "We are Alive", an allusion to the telegram sent by On Kawara in 1969 and here adapted to the present situation. The phrase appears as a testimony to the survival of one of the regions worst affected by the pandemic, Latin America, where the numbers of infections and deaths continue to rise.

For his part, the Colombian artist **Mateo López** offers us a logo which joins together a heart shape and a speech bubble to symbolize a caring word, a word that comes at the right time to say "You matter to me". **Alejandra Seeber** has written in red the word *Futuro*, with each letter formed by a series of lipstick kisses. She made the piece with her 11-year-

old daughter in a double gesture, at once critical and hopeful, in the face of what is to come.

These Times brings together interventions that travel from different latitudes to make visible the simultaneity of a pandemic that affects the vulnerability of bodies, with no exceptions of race, class, gender or religion. As we confront the difficulties and the likely prospects of the current situation, what these artists are saying to us is: *These Times are convulsive, These Times are uncertain, These Times are turbulent*, and also, *These Times are of solidarity*, and, definitively, *These Times are of resistance*.